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EMERGENCY ACTION CLOSES A PORTION OF CAPE COD BAY WHITING AREA TO LOBSTERING DURING OCTOBER

Because some lobstermen are not complying with the Cape Cod Bay Whiting Area Access Agreement, DMF has decided to take emergency action to close a portion of the Whiting Area to lobstering from October 1 through October 31. The boundaries of the closure are listed below.

The agreement developed between lobstermen and draggers has been in place since 1997 and had been very successful. Cooperation between fishermen has enabled them to avoid regulation and to voluntarily share Cape Cod Bay in September and October with hardly any conflict. However, some lobstermen refused to abide by the agreement and have forced DMF to implement an emergency regulation to prevent these lobstermen from continuing their movement of gear from west to east in the Bay. DMF concluded that encroaching lobster gear on the few fishing areas left for whiting fishermen in the Bay had to be stopped during October when whiting catches and fleet effort are expected to peak. Groundfish closed areas in upper Cape Cod Bay and Massachusetts Bay have prevented draggers from fishing in adjacent waters and have made them unusually dependent on the Whiting Area.

We commend those lobstermen who have respected the agreement even when others violated its spirit during September. They honored the agreement by staying to the west of the 13885 line. Others fished up to the 13875 line scheduled to be the new western boundary by agreement on October 1. In order to avoid continued regulatory action that will prohibit setting of lobster pots in the "whiting area" in 2001, DMF will seek input from fishermen during the coming winter to reinforce the previously established voluntary agreements.

Presently, during October 1-31, it shall be unlawful to set, store, or abandon lobster pots in the area defined by these lines:

Northern boundary: state territorial waters line

Western boundary: 13875 line

Southern boundary: 44100 line

Eastern boundary: 13845 to 44120 to 13830 line

The Division of Law Enforcement will patrol the lines to ensure compliance. Violators may face temporary suspension of their lobster permit and/or seizure of gear.

For further information contact David Pierce (ext. 142) or Daniel McKiernan (ext. 132) at DMF's Pocasset office (508)563-1779.